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ACTION ARA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3092
AMEMBASSY ASUNCION PRIORITY
INFO USMISSION NEW YORK

[REDACTED] BUENOS AIRES 8358

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SHUM, AR, PA
SUBJECT: DETENTION OF EPIFANIO MENDEZ FLEITAS AND SON
REF: (A) STATE 260863 (B) BA 8231

SUMMARY: MEMBERS OF PARAGUAYAN COLORADO EXILE COMMUNITY CALLED AT AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES TO DISCUSS DETENTION OF EPIFANIO MENDEZ AND HIS SON. SEVERAL VERSIONS OF WHY MENDEZ WAS DETAINED, VAGUE HOPES FOR HIS RELEASE, POLITICAL ASYLUM FOR MENDEZ AND HIS COLORADO PARTY FOLLOWERS AND THE POSSIBILITY OF MENDEZ' IMMIGRATION TO THE U.S. WERE DISCUSSED.

1. THREE MEMBERS OF THE PARAGUAYAN EXILE COLORADO PARTY YOUTH MOVEMENT, INCLUDING ANOTHER SON OF THE DETAINED LEADER EPIFANIO MENDEZ, CALLED ON EMBASSY POLITICAL OFFICER ON NOVEMBER 3. IN A LONG CONVERSATION WHICH SWITCHED BACK AND FORTH FROM OPTIMISM FLOWING FROM THE INTERNATIONAL PRESSURES BEING BROUGHT TO BEAR ON GOA TO EFFECT THE RELEASE OF MENDEZ AND HIS SON, EPIFANIO, TO SOMBER EVALUATION OF THE POSSIBILITIES OF THE COLORADO EXILE COMMUNITY CONTINUING TO LIVE IN ARGENTINA, THE FOLLOWING POINTS WERE RAISED:

2. DETENTION --
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ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)
U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS
Margaret P. Grafeld, Director
() Release (X) Excise () Deny
Exemption(s): B3, N/A, B-6
Declassify: () In Part (X) In Full
() Classify as () Extend as () Downgrade to
Date Declassify on Reason

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EPIFANIO MENDEZ FLEITAS SPOKE TO HIS DAUGHTER, THERESA FAITH, IN PALO ALTO, CALIF [REDACTED] ON OCT 31. MENDEZ INDICATED IN THE CALL THAT HE WAS BEING DETAINED FOR INVESTIGATION OF SUPPOSED CONNECTIONS WITH THE ERP/PRT. THIS IS THE SAME REASON GIVEN IN THE SECOND ARMY'S FORMAL HABEAS CORPUS REPLY. IT IS AT VARIANCE WITH THE INFORMATION GENERAL SUAREZ MASON REPORTEDLY PROVIDED TO CONGRESSMAN PAUL MCCLOSKEY LAST WEEK THAT MENDEZ AND SON WERE BEING HELD IN RESISTENCIA, CHACO FOR COMMON CRIMES. B6

LOCAL COLORADO PARTY MILITANTS BELIEVE THAT THE ACTION AGAINST MENDEZ IS INSPIRED BY THE PARAGUAYAN GOVERNMENT WISH TO KEEP EPIFANIO MENDEZ "FROZEN" UNTIL AFTER THE UPCOMING PARAGUAYAN ELECTIONS WITH THE HELP OF THE ARGENTINE POLICE WHO THEY CLAIM ARE ENGAGED IN SMUGGLING JOINT OPERATIONS IN CHACO PROVINCE.

3. INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT --

THERE IS SUBSTANTIAL INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT BUILDING FOR THE RELEASE OF MENDEZ AND HIS SON. THE COLORADO EXILE GROUP IN BUENOS AIRES (WHICH CLAIMS 400 TO 600 MILITANTS) HAS CONTACTED THE EMBASSIES OF COLUMBIA, VENEZUELA, COSTA RICA AND MEXICO, TO SEEK DIPLOMATIC SUPPORT FOR THE RELEASE OF THEIR LEADER. THEY HAVE ALSO APPROACHED DR. DUTO OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSION FOR REFUGEES FOR HELP. FAMILY AND FRIENDS OUTSIDE OF ARGENTINA HAVE CONTACTED THE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION OF THE OAS AND THE UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS.

4. ASYLUM --

THIS SECOND DETENTION OF MENDEZ IN ARGENTINA IS CAUSING CONSIDERABLE APPREHENSION AMONG THE COLORADO EXILES IN BUENOS AIRES. THEY FEAR THAT UNLESS THE GOVERNMENT OF ARGENTINA WILL GUARANTEE MENDEZ' FUTURE SAFETY HERE, HE WILL BE FORCED TO SEEK POLITICAL ASYLUM OUTSIDE OF THE COUNTRY.

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THE GROUP INDICATED THAT THEY HAVE RECEIVED A "TACIT PROMISE" FOR POLITICAL ASYLUM IN VENEZUELA FOR MENDEZ SHOULD THAT BE NEEDED. HOWEVER, THEIR REAL HOPE WAS THAT SOME SORT OF UNDERSTANDING COULD BE REACHED FOR MENDEZ' CONTINUED RESIDENCE IN ARGENTINA BECAUSE IF A MAN OF HIS STATURE IS FORCED OUT, THERE ARE NO GUARANTEES FOR THE ENTIRE EXILED COLORADO COMMUNITY IN THE COUNTRY. THEY ASSERTED THAT THERE WAS LIST OF OVER 200 LOCAL COLORADO RESIDENTS IDENTIFIED FOR ARREST SHOULD THE GOA DECIDE TO MOVE AGAINST THE GROUP.

5. RELEASE --

EMBOFF WAS UNABLE TO ELICIT ANY CONCRETE INFORMATION REGARDING A SCENARIO FOR MENDEZ FLEITAS AND HIS SON'S RELEASE FROM CHACO. THE COLORADO PARTY MEMBERS SEEMED OPTIMISTIC THAT THIS WOULD BE ACCOMPLISHED BY THE PRESSURES OF WORLD PUBLIC OPINION ON THE GOVERNMENT OF ARGENTINA.

6. DR. OSVALDO CHAVEZ, WHO DESCRIBED HIMSELF AS AN PARAGUAYAN AMBASSADOR TO THE U.S. AND OAS (DURING EISENHOWER ADMINISTRATION) PAID A SEPARATE CALL AT EMBASSY TO DISCUSS THE MENDEZ CASE. CHAVEZ STATED THAT IT WAS BY PURE COINCIDENCE THAT THE TRAFFIC ALTERCATION INVOLVING THE SON TOOK PLACE IN FRONT OF A HOTEL WHERE A VISITING PARAGUAYAN MILITARY DELEGATION WAS BEING LODGED. CHAVEZ SAID HE HAD NO FIRM INFORMATION AT THIS DISPOSAL WHICH COULD EXPLAIN THE MOTIVES OF THE ARGENTINE AUTHORITIES WHO DETAINED MENDEZ, NOR COULD HE CONFIRM THAT THE PARAGUAYAN GOVERNMENT WAS RESPONSIBLE.

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HOWEVER, HIS LINE OF CONJECTURE WAS THAT ON LEARNING THERE WAS A TRAFFIC INCIDENT NEAR THEIR HOTEL INVOLVING A PARAGUAYAN NAMED EPIFANIO MENDEZ THE VISITING MILITARY IMMEDIATELY RECOGNIZED THE NAME, AND CONFUSING THE SON WITH THE FATHER, MAY HAVE PERSUADED THE ARGENTINES TO PICK UP MENDEZ SR. ON THE ALLEGATION HE WAS A SUBVERSIVE (WHICH CHAVEZ VEHEMENTLY DENIED). CHAVEZ SEEMED TO BELIEVE THAT THE PARAGUAYAN'S MOTIVE WAS TO HARASS AND INTIMIDATE MENDEZ ON ACCOUNT OF HIS PUBLIC STAND AGAINST THE STROESSNER REGIME AND THAT SOONER OR LATER HE WOULD BE RELEASED BY THE ARGENTINES.

7. CHAVEZ INCIDENTALLY EXPRESSED INTEREST IN MAINTAINING CONTACT WITH EMBASSY. WOULD APPRECIATE ASUNCION'S COMMENTS.

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8. EMBASSY COMMENT: MUCH OF THE COMMENTARY OF THE MEMBERS OF THE EXILE COMMUNITY APPEARS TO BE BASED ON SPECULATION AND WE DO NOT HAVE HARDER INFORMATION AS TO THE REASONS FOR THE MENDEZ DETENTIONS OR THEIR PROSPECTS. CHAPLIN

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